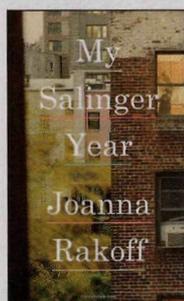
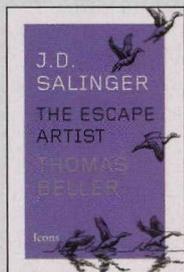


## THE SALINGER AURA

Beller offers a uniquely literary inquiry into the combatively reclusive and epically blocked author of *The Catcher in the Rye* and beloved short story collections. Acutely attuned to the “aura of trespass” surrounding Salinger, Beller makes pilgrimages to Salinger’s boyhood home (Beller grew up nearby) and summer camp, and considers Salinger’s preoccupation with authenticity in light of the big family lie revealed after his bar mitzvah, that his mother wasn’t actually Jewish. Beller reports on young Salinger’s humorous writings for school newspapers and his love for his sister, who became fashion director for Bloomingdale’s, a career linked to Beller’s inquiry into the key roles clothing plays in Salinger’s fiction. Then there’s Salinger’s strange, doomed marriage to a “low-level” Nazi after serving as a counterintelligence officer in WWII and being among the first Americans to enter the concentration camps. Amid exciting close readings of Salinger’s distinctly affecting prose, Beller pays tribute to the overlooked *New Yorker* editor he believes helped Salinger excel, Gustave Loblano. In all, a fine and stirring portrait of a haunted literary artist who rejected 17 “different shades of white” for the cover of *Franny and Zooey*, stopped talking to his daughter when she wrote her memoir, and barricaded himself in solitude, a “poet of longing,” elisions, and absence.



Rakoff, the author of a much praised first novel, *A Fortunate Age* (2009), chronicles her year working at the problematically retro New York literary agency that had been representing the reclusive, nearly deaf, and still demanding J. D. Salinger since 1942. It’s 1996, and Rakoff’s chain-smoking boss is loud and cryptic. There is no computer on the premises, and Rakoff’s nebulous responsibilities entail using an ancient Dictaphone and handling Salinger’s heart-battering fan mail—hundreds of letters from lonely, angry teens and grateful military veterans who recognize in the author one of their damaged own. A poet involved with an unsavory, wannabe novelist, Rakoff misses her far more reliable college boyfriend. She finds her low-wage job enchanting, intimidating, ludicrous, and, briefly, thrilling when Salinger pitches the agency into a tizzy by allowing a teeny-tiny press to turn “Hapworth” (1965), his last published story, into a book. As Rakoff recounts her funny and wrenching personal predicaments, she also charts the quiet battle of attrition between the values of the old publishing world, personal and impassioned, and the aggressively invasive corporate imperative. An intriguing look at the ever-fascinating Salinger and a gracefully incisive tale of love and literature, creativity and survival. —*Donna Seaman*

### ★ J. D. Salinger: The Escape Artist.

By Thomas Beller.

June 2014. 192p. Houghton/Amazon/New Harvest, \$20 (9780544261990). 813.

### ★ My Salinger Year. By Joanna Rakoff.

June 2014. 272p. Knopf, \$25.95 (9780307958006). 818.

### Mona Lisa: A Life Discovered.

By Dianne Hales.

Aug. 2014. 336p. Simon & Schuster, \$28 (9781451658965). 759.5.

Biography, history, and memoir are woven together in Hales’ (*La Bella Lingua*, 2009) lyrical biography of Lisa Gherardini, the *donna vera* (real woman) captured in Leonardo da Vinci’s early sixteenth-century masterpiece, *Mona Lisa*. Hales paints a vivid history of the dramatic, often violent Renaissance Florence in which Gherardini lived: a town populated with scheming politicians, warring religious factions, and artists boasting rock-star popularity. Intertwined with this tale is Gherardini’s personal biography as a daughter, a merchant’s wife, a devoted mother, and a family matriarch—a story that provides counterpoint to the epic, male-dominated history of the age. The verifiable facts of Gherardini’s life are scarce, so Hales leans heavily on “informed imagination,” delving deeply into the customs, rituals, and relationships that governed women’s lives in Renaissance Italy. Throughout the book, she scours archives, interrogates scholars, and walks the streets of Florence, seeking traces of Gherardini in detail and in spirit. These first-person accounts reveal the author’s deep kinship with Gherardini, and her quest endows human subjectivity to one of art history’s greatest icons. —*Lindsay Bosch*

### Neil Armstrong: A Life of Flight.

By Jay Barbree.

July 2014. 384p. illus. St. Martin’s/Thomas Dunne, \$27.99 (9781250040718); e-book (9781466836341). 629.450.

Though a famous, much chronicled astronaut, Neil Armstrong wanted to write his own story with the help of NBC reporter Barbree, who’d covered every one of his missions. But Armstrong, who died in 2012, was such a self-effacing man, he couldn’t bring himself to write a book focusing on him alone. He’d talked to Barbree for years about the chief passions of his life, flying and his family. Drawing on those long talks and with the cooperation of Armstrong’s family, Barbree offers an intimate portrait of a man grateful to have spent his life doing what he loved. Armstrong talked to Barbree about his two marriages, the death of his baby daughter, the close fellowship among pilots and astronauts, and the astonishing experiences of his space exploration missions. Timed to coincide with the forty-fifth anniversary of the *Apollo 11* space launch, Barbree’s book includes many never-before-seen photos, a look back at the competition to win the space race with the Soviets, and Armstrong’s vision for the future of space exploration. —*Vanessa Bush*

### The Real Custer: From Boy General to Tragic Hero.

By James S. Robbins.

June 2014. 304p. Regnery, \$29.99 (9781621572091). 973.8.

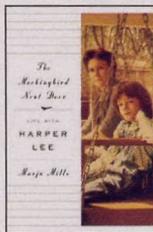
Deserved or not, it is the fate of George Armstrong Custer to be best remembered for his monumental failure, the entirely avoidable

### ★ The Mockingbird Next Door: Life with Harper Lee.

By Marja Mills.

July 2014. 276p. Penguin, \$27.95 (9781594205194). 813.

Harper Lee, author of the “national touchstone,” *To Kill a Mockingbird*, withdrew from the relentless vortex of fame and never published another book. Her silence, like that of J. D. Salinger, has been a compelling literary mystery. When *To Kill a Mockingbird* was chosen for One Book, One Chicago in 2001, *Chicago Tribune* reporter Mills traveled to



Lee’s Alabama hometown, certain that she would never get anywhere near the author. Instead, Mills found herself living a literary fairy tale, as Alice, Harper’s older sister by

15 years, still working as an attorney in her nineties, ushered Mills into their book-filled home. Soon Mills, much to her astonishment, is watching football games, going fishing, and sharing meals with Alice, Nelle (Harper is her middle name), and their friends. When the Lees express their hope that Mills will record their reminiscences and “set the record straight,” she rents the house next door and devotes herself to listening to tales of the Lee family; Nelle’s relationship with their childhood neighbor, Truman Capote (“Truman was a psychopath, honey”); and the nearly overwhelming repercussions of Nelle’s novel. Mills’ struggles with lupus bring her even closer to the sisters. As she portrays the exceptional Lee women and their modest, slow-paced world with awed precision, Mills creates a uniquely intimate, ruminative, and gently illuminating biographical memoir. —*Donna Seaman*

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